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ABSTRACT

Societal changes of the past three decades call for a fundamental change in the structure of the educational system and in the culture of schooling. Disadvantaged African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos, in particular, historically have suffered from the cultural misalignment of home, school, and community. The reform of educational culture that must take place in order to allow educationally and economically disadvantaged students to achieve their potential will be facilitated by the emerging new paradigms of society that emphasize the existence of multiple perspectives; the multiple linkages between, and the interdependence of, the various factors within the educational environment; and shared leadership. (Nine references) (CLA)

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INSIGHTS ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

Number 24 October 1990

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Cultural Misalignment and Emerging Paradigms

Societal changes in the United States in the past three decades are dictating, for the first time in over a century, fundamental change in the structure of the educational system and the culture of schooling. In order to create schools in which educationally and economically disadvantaged students from cultures at the margins of mainstream society can reach their potential, reform will have to take place in the culture of our schools. If public education is to successfully survive into the 21st century, new paradigms must shape the organization of the educational system — the paradigms of multiple perspectives, interdependence, and shared leadership.

Cultural Misalignment

Societal changes have resulted in a cultural misalignment between the traditional culture of the school and the culture of many of our families, neighborhoods, and cities (Comer, 1988). A child whose home environment and social background have resulted in development at odds with the mainstream will enter school at a distinct educational disadvantage. Those with under-developed language or social skills enter school unprepared to meet the school's expectations for academic readiness. Those who do not speak English, or who behave according to expectations of the home that are radically different from those of the school, enter the school culture unprepared to "bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school" (Comer, 1988). Those whose families lack basic material and psychological resources enter school without the benefit of advocates in the home — that is, family members who can interpret the school curriculum for the child's benefit, who can evaluate the quality of education being offered the child, and who know how to interact effectively with the school system and intercede on behalf of the child (Gandara, 1989).

Children with the greatest educational needs tend to come from families at the margins of the mainstream culture — minority groups, immigrants, non-English speaking families, and economically disadvantaged populations (Levin, 1987). Three groups, in particular, historically have suffered from the cultural misalignment of home, school, and community — disadvantaged African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos. Educationally and economically disadvantaged African American students often are "caught between a school system that fails to acknowledge that black students are capable of academic achievement and a black community that considers academic striving as *acting white*" (Fordham & Ogbu, cite in Ianni, 1989, p. 681).

Many African American parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds have come to expect the school to fail their children as other mainstream institutions have failed them. Indeed, conventional schools, "with their hierarchical and authoritarian structure, cannot give underdeveloped or differently developed students the skills and experiences that will enable them to fulfill expectations at the school" (Comer, 1988, p. 46). Struggling students, alienated parents, and defensive school personnel create and perpetuate a relationship of mutual distrust between home and school. The result is that the family and school cannot join in supporting the overall development of the child. Ultimately, the child must choose between participating in non-mainstream groups that provide a "sense of ade-

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quacy, belonging and self-affirmation" or rejecting the culture of parents and peer group to pursue academic achievement in the mainstream (Comer,1988, p. 46).

In a similar vein, a 1989 report by the U.S. Senate subcommittee on Indian education asserted that the failure of schools to recognize the importance and validity of the Native American community has caused "both the community and its children (to) retaliate by treating the school as an alien institution" (McDonald, 1989). Rachel Misra of the Navajo tribal-education division has suggested that Native Americans' basic distrust of the purposes and payoffs of education contributes to an exceptionally high and unusually steady rate of attrition. Researchers calculated from a 1987 survey that 90% of Navajo children who enter kindergarten will not complete high school (McDonald, 1989).

A major source of this distrust is found in the well-entrenched insensitivity of the mainstream school culture. The Native American child experiences direct conflict between many mainstream values in the typical school and the values learned and practiced at home. For example, school methods often promote individual competition, personal pride, and assertiveness among students, while many Native American cultures promote individual cooperation, personal modesty, and harmony (McDonald, 1989).

As the dominant language minority in the United States, the Latino population is comprised of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and (in smaller numbers) immigrants of other Spanish-speaking heritage. Individual families within these groups are diverse, as well, in their Spanish-speaking ability and dialect, their generational status in the United States, and their socio-economic background. Within the Latino population, those children whose families' language and socio-economic status are at odds with the mainstream experience a double risk in the traditional school culture. Compounding this are cultural incongruities similar to those found between mainstream and Native American cultures.

In the chart below, Scarcella (1990) contrasts the differences between mainstream teachers' and Latino parents' cultural expectations for students.

Mainstream American Teachers' Expectations	Latino Parents' Expectations
Students should participate in classroom activities and discussion.	**Students should be quiet and obedient, observing more than participating.**
Students should be creative, free to respond to requirements in their own ways.	**Students should be shown what to do but allowed to organize the completion of the task creatively.**
Students learn through inquiry.	**Students learn through observation.**
Students should do their own work.	**Students should help one another.**
Critical thinking is important; analytical thinking is important too.	**Factual information is important; fantasy is too.**
Goals are important.	**People are important.**
Children should state their own opinions, even when they contradict the teacher's.	**Teachers are not to be challenged.**
Students need to ask questions.	**Students should not ask a lot of questions.**

From: Scarcella, R. (1990). *Teaching language minority students in the multicultural classroom.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., p. 171.

Using New Paradigms to Change the Educational Culture

In order to create schools with an environment that accepts, welcomes, and allows educationally and economically disadvantaged students to achieve their potential, reform of the educational culture will have to take place. Such reform must include strategies for adapting to home and community cultures that differ from the mainstream and for responding to dysfunctional conditions in the community. Some communities are plagued by poverty, violence, drug abuse, racism, and other behaviors and attitudes that are detrimental to human health, equity, and achievement. Schools need to recognize the reality of these conditions and their effect on student learning, and need to develop strategies for helping students overcome such conditions. What the educational system can no longer afford to do is ignore either the cultural differences or the environmental conditions that affect student learning.

The cultural connection between schools, their communities, and the mainstream society illustrates the need to consider educational reform through the perspectives provided by emerging new paradigms. The paradigms of a society are the lenses through which everything is perceived; they are patterns of basic concepts that form a map of reality. This map guides people's perceptions — it tells them what is real, what may be false, and what to pay attention to; it dictates the methods they use to solve problems. The old paradigms are no longer consistent with what various scientific and social science disciplines are uncovering, and new paradigms are emerging (Schwartz & Ogilvy, 1979).

There are three common threads in the emerging paradigms — a shift from seeking ultimate truths to exploring multiple perspectives, a shift from explanations involving linear causality to a model of multiple causation and mutual adaptation, and a shift from hierarchical control to shared leadership. These new paradigms can provide a different perspective on problems that have proven resistant to change efforts based on the old paradigms. These new paradigms can form the basis for an approach to structuring an educational system that incorporates cultural diversity and seeks to overcome dysfunctional environmental conditions.

Successfully implementing change in the culture of the educational system requires a shift to a paradigm that considers multiple perspectives. When the various perspectives present in a community are harmonized, a shared vision of the purpose of education can be forged. Creating a vision based on multiple perspectives is a way of assuring broad-based commitment to the vision as the fundamental guiding force for change. Similarly, the shift to a paradigm of multiple causality recognizes the multiple linkages between, and the interdependence of, the various factors within the educational environment. The educational system cannot ignore the environmental conditions or the ethnic diversity that exist outside the walls of its schools. Conversely, the culture of the home and community must support, as well as contribute to, the values and goals of the educational system. Ianni (1989) has asserted that the messages the home and the school send to individual students should be mutually reinforcing rather than working at cross purposes.

Finally, the educational system must move to a paradigm of collaborative and collegial professional partnership in the leadership of schools. Control-oriented management produces outcomes that subvert the interests of both the organization and the people who work in it. In the business sector, successful companies develop structures aimed at empowering people (Levine, 1986). Similarly, the leadership of schools needs to be broadened to include those who have a vested interest in seeing students achieve: teachers, parents, community members, and the students themselves.

Shared leadership empowers people and develops in them a sense of commitment to and concern for the organization. If people have invested in decisions, they have a stake in seeing solutions work; conversely, uninvolved people may have a stake in seeing solutions fail. Shared leadership patterns — talking to, listening to, and involving people — not only tap the resources of people to solve specific

problems, but engage their willing cooperation and commitment (ASCD, 1985). Including teachers, parents, and students in the leadership of schools and districts can ensure a greater awareness of and sensitivity to the cultural differences that students bring with them to the school. It also can provide a strategy by which those cultural differences can be effectively integrated into the school culture.

Conclusion

Because the existing educational model is so familiar — based on ultimate truths, solutions that assume linear causality, and control-oriented hierarchy — it is difficult to conceive of new models. The old paradigms, however, are no longer adequate guides for solving the problems created by changes in the world around us. The old paradigms do not provide ways of viewing problems from multiple perspectives, of integrating home and community culture into the culture of the school, or of broadening the leadership base. If public education is to successfully survive into the 21st century, there must be a change in the paradigms that guide the organization of the educational system — a shift to multiple perspectives, to interdependence, and to shared leadership.

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